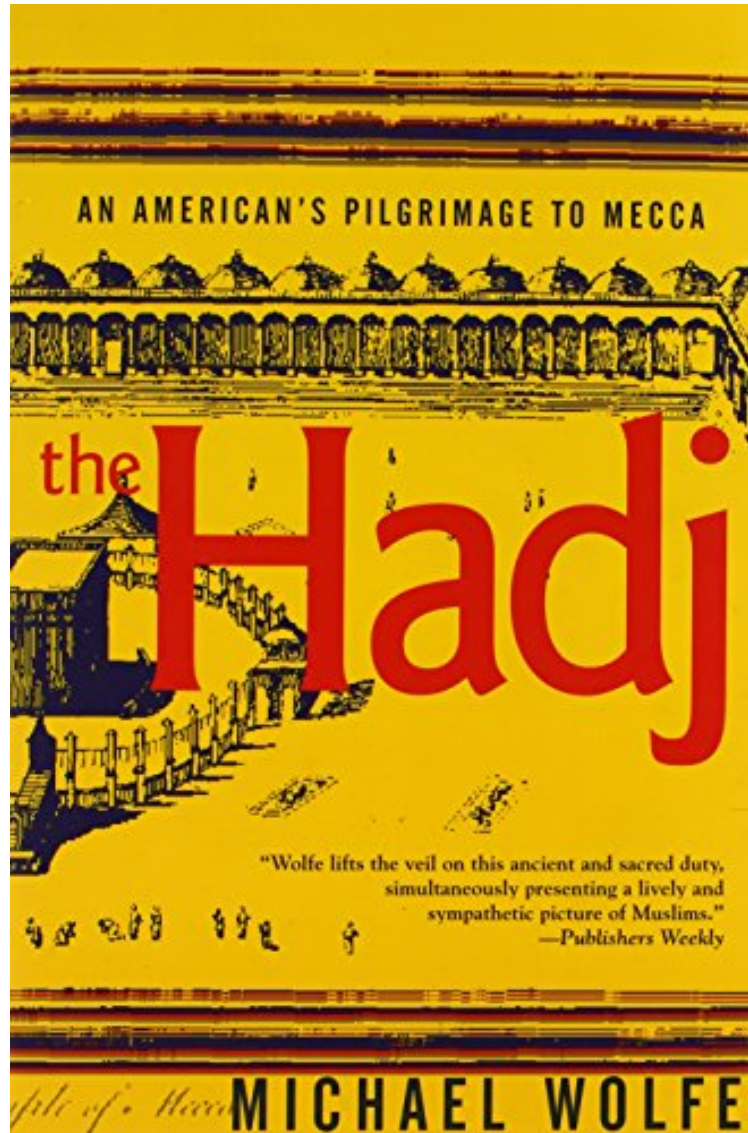


[Free pdf] The Hadj: An American's Pilgrimage to Mecca

The Hadj: An American's Pilgrimage to Mecca

Michael Wolfe

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Michael Wolfe : The Hadj: An American's Pilgrimage to Mecca before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Hadj: An American's Pilgrimage to Mecca:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Great read for meBy barbara Kapp SchwamSo clearly written! I knew Michael Wolfe when we were teenagers. He was already a brilliant poet. He was very deeply longing for knowledge and meaning back then. This is a journey. It continues. For someone who dwells on the negative aspects of religion, he helps me understand some of the reasons people --smart people-- embrace it.0 of 0 people found the

following review helpful. Must ReadBy CustomerAn exceptionally well written travel book first and foremost, Wolfe's *The Hadj* also provides a thought provoking introduction to Islam from the perspective of a new American convert to that religion.³ of 4 people found the following review helpful. Approaching the Hadj as a travelerBy PristineOn the strength of a travelogue alone, I would give Wolfe's book a 4 star. It has all the ingredients of a piece written by a well-read traveler: historical contexts, quotations from predecessors who have traveled the same path, descriptive passages concerning both landscape and human figures, and most importantly, a show of restraint by withholding ethnocentric judgments that fly all too easily when cultures collide.*The Hadj* is a good primer for stateside readers whose only education about Islam consists of shouting pundits on fair and balanced news stations. It shows that there is a majority of Muslims who are not concerned with violence and are not preoccupied throughout the day with terrorist thoughts.*The problem begins when readers approach the book expecting either a political angle or a spiritual angle. We don't expect a travel journal about London to delve into a detailed commentary about imperialistic regimes achieved through naval superiority, so why should the author of the Hadj need to impose Western concepts of egalitarian societies onto his observations? I found that as long as I read the Hadj as nothing but a travelogue, it was quite satisfying. Every person has their reasons for embarking on a spiritual journey, so I won't question Wolfe's true reasons. I will confess that at the opening of the book, when I read these lines "I was looking for a framework I could live with, a vocabulary of spiritual concepts applicable to the life I was living now. I did not want to 'trade in' my culture. I wanted access to new meanings," and later on, "The more I learned about Islam, the more it appeared to conform to what I was looking for"; I almost put down the book and stopped right there. An Assyrian friend of mine once said: "Many Americans have an odd way of treating religion: They pick and choose as if they were at a spiritual buffet. They pluck what they need from each culture to meet their conveniences." It's true. We drop Zen when we're too lazy to provide an explanation; we pull out the Kaballah when we have lost our mystery; we get a bit of relaxation from the Hindu yogis after a hard week at work, and confess to being a Christian when there's a sale on red wine. Islam is not on the menu. Islam means "obedience, submission to god, surrender of the self." So when Wolfe prefaces his book about a spiritual journey by announcing that Islam appeals to his personal needs, it pretty much sets the stage for one's expectations from the book in terms of spirituality. I felt that there were moments when the author was more intent on observing his surroundings, seeking comfort and relief from the heat and exhaustion, and completing a business deal involving the sale of used cars, then embarking on a spiritual journey. At the height of the Hadj for example (at Mount Mercy) when colleagues of the author busied themselves with reading the Qu'ran, he goes off to look for drinks, friends, shelter, and a better view. I was continually befuddled at why a novice wouldn't try his hardest to seek enlightenment when standing on the spiritual center of his new religion. It's these moments I felt the book should really be read as a travelogue about the Hadj, and not as one man's personal spiritual journey. I won't rule out the fact that as a novice convert at that time, Wolfe may still have some time before coming into his own. So there's no judgment made here. Just sharing an observation for those who expect to gain insight on the spiritual angle. A bibliography of further reading and a helpful glossary completes this book. A breezy read for us Kafirs who need a bit of education about our Muslim brothers and sisters.*

*The Hadj, or sacred journey, is the pilgrimage to the house of God at Mecca that all Muslims are asked to make once in their lifetimes. One of the worlds longest-lived religious rites, having continued without break for fourteen hundred years, it is, like all things Islamic, shrouded in mystery for Westerners. In *The Hadj*, Michael Wolfe, an American who converted to Islam, recounts his own journey a pilgrim, and in doing so brings readers close to the heart of what the pilgrimage means to a member of the religion that claims one-sixth of the worlds population. Not since Sir Richard Burtons account of the pilgrimage to Mecca over one hundred years ago has a Western writer described the Hadj in such fascinating detail.*

*From Publishers Weekly*In an engaging and instructive account of his experiences as a Muslim pilgrim to Mecca, California freelance writer, editor and publisher Wolfe lifts the veil for Western readers on this ancient and sacred duty of Islam, simultaneously presenting a lively and sympathetic picture of Muslims. Wolfe, a self-described "mongrel" son of a Christian mother and a Jewish father, says he wanted not to "trade in" his culture in his recent conversion to Islam, but to find "access to new meanings" and "an escape route from the isolating terms of a materialistic culture." He explores new meanings through readings in translation of Islamic literature, religion and history, but most of all in discussions with other men, especially the wise, folksy and enthusiastic Mostopha, with whom he spends Ramadan. (Not surprisingly, the only woman of note in the book is Mostopha's wife Qadisha who, it seems, is always cooking.) The pilgrimage itself is palpably detailed with its intense heat, ardor, bonding, visits to holy sites, multitude of prayers, rules, illnesses and kindnesses, all shared by the more than a million pilgrims who crowd this awesome holy ritual. Copyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc.*From Kirkus s*A rare firsthand account, by an American writer and recent Muslim convert, of a journey to the geographical heart of ``the least understood of the world's great religions." Wolfe postpones his trip to Mecca until the second half of his narrative, preceding it with a colorful but meandering description of his sojourn in Morocco. There, he wanders through noisy bazaars, sleeps on sheepskins, chats with

Moroccan friends about politics and faith, watches a Sufi group chant and sway, visits Paul Bowles, dons a djellaba for daily Islamic prayers, and gradually comes to feel more at home in that exotic culture. But all this is padding, if skillfully stitched together. Readers will sigh with relief when Wolfe's plane finally touches down in Jiddah and he emerges into the blistering heat of a Saudi summer. Here, again, Wolfe insists on detailing countless conversations with friends and companions, but he also describes--as vividly as any writer before him--the swelter and crush of millions of pilgrims jostling past the Kaaba (the great cubical stone in the center of Mecca's great mosque) or wending their way to the valley of Arafat. Everyone wears the pilgrim's white terry-cloth robes; personal identity is submerged; all eyes are on Allah. While in Mecca, not all is religion--Wolfe mediates an automobile deal, reads Lord Jim, meets pilgrims from around the world--but everything remains subordinate to the author's being at the core of "the final, matured expression of an original religion reaching back to Adam." Brief forays into Islamic theology and history help explain things--with some cheerleading--for untutored readers. Notable, in these muted polemical digressions, is Wolfe's decision to ignore the most common criticisms of Islam, for its views on violence and on women. Too cluttered, and blemished by sly jibes at Judaism and Christianity, but still memorable as travelogue and Islamic apologetic. -- Copyright 1993, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved. "Wolfe has perhaps provided the clearest statement of an American Muslim since Malcolm X." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*"The most engaging of travel books . . . his pilgrimage will move people of all faiths and of none at all, because it describes a universal journey for meaning, transcendence and peace." *The Literary* "Wolfe lifts the veil on this ancient and sacred duty, simultaneously presenting a lively and sympathetic picture of Muslims." *Publishers Weekly*"It requires a special sensitivity to write well about the Hadj. . . . Michael Wolfe's tone is exactly right." *The Times Literary Supplement*